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NSC BRIEFING

11 September 1957

SOVIET ICBM ANNOUNCEMENT



II. On 26 August, Soviets made following announcement:

"In conformity with the scientific-research program, successful tests of an intercontinental ballistic rocket, as well as explosions of nuclear and thermonuclear weapons, have taken place in the Soviet Union.

"A super long-distance intercontinental multistage ballistic rocket was launched a few days ago. The tests of the rocket ^{was} successful; they fully confirmed the correctness of the calculations and the selected design. The rocket flew at a very high, unprecedented altitude, covering a huge distance in a brief time. The rocket landed in the target area. The results obtained show that it is possible to direct rockets into any part of the world.

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"The solution of the problem of designing intercontinental ballistic rockets will make it possible to reach remote areas without resorting to a strategic air force which at the present time is vulnerable to up-to-date means of antiaircraft defense.

"Taking into consideration the tremendous contribution to the advance of science and the great importance of this scientific-technical achievement for strengthening the defense potential of the Soviet state, the Soviet Government expresses gratitude to a large group of workers who have taken part in designing and manufacturing the intercontinental ballistic rockets and the complex of facilities for launching them."

III. We believe this statement is based on fact. However, we cannot say for sure that Soviets have actually test-fired a ballistic missile to the full length

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V. The London Economist has nicely summarized the implications of Soviet statement:

"Moscow's announcement on Monday of the arrival of the first inter-continental ballistic missile must be assumed to be true. When the Russians used to boast that Popov and Ivanov had invented everything from aeroplanes to Zeppelins, an attitude of complacent doubt was permissible; indeed, it may be permissible now when it is only Mr. Khrushchev promising the Russians an American diet. But when they have claimed specific contemporary technical achievements, particularly in the military field, Soviet official announcements have never been empty boasts; on jet aircraft and atomic and hydrogen bombs they were rapidly substantiated. Hence, if Tass says that a 'super long-distance, inter-continental, multi-stage

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ballistic rocket' was launched, flew at unprecedented altitude, and 'landed in a target area,' it is best to assume that this has really happened, and to ponder what it means, rather than to waste time in being blandly sceptical."

- VI. Should be remembered that there is long rocky road from first test to operational weapon. Soviets have a lot of work yet to do.
- A. Our previous estimate has been that Soviets could have first operational ICBM capability (i.e., one unit equipped to fire such missiles in anger) in 1960-61. We are currently reexamining this estimate in the light of these new developments. CIA's hunch is that the date may have to be moved up to 1959.
- VII. If the Soviets chose to locate operational launching sites for a 3500 nautical mile missile in the Kamchatka-Chuk~~ot~~sk area, missiles launched from there would have sufficient range to reach all of the United States except the deep southeast (see map).

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